

Veterans' Health Today

WINTER 2005

Heart Disease:
Not Just a Man's
Disease Anymore

Detecting
Colorectal Cancer

VOLUNTEER
Rekindling the
American Spirit

MyHealtheVet

If the Unthinkable
Happens, Will You
Be Prepared?



Heart Disease:

Not Just a Man's Disease Any More



Surprisingly, heart disease is the leading cause of death for American women. In America today, 13% of women over the age of 45 have had a heart attack and nearly 8 million American women are now living with heart disease. These startling statistics from the National Center on Health Statistics and the American Heart Association's 2002 Statistical Update point out the importance of diagnosing heart disease in women.

According to Dr. Helme Silvet, cardiologist at the VA Healthcare Center in Loma Linda, one long-standing problem has been the under-diagnosis of heart disease in women.

"The symptoms of heart disease in women may look somewhat different than in men," says Silvet. "Women may not experience crushing chest pain or pain radiating down the arm that are normally classic heart attack symptoms." In addition, women have traditionally perceived heart disease as a "man's" disease and often have not been aware of their own risk for heart disease or active in its prevention.

"Every woman should be aware of factors that put them at high risk for heart disease," says Dr. Silvet. Among the risk factors are:

1. Diabetes
2. High blood pressure
3. High cholesterol
4. Smoking
5. A family history of heart disease.

Dr. Silvet stresses that women who have one or more of these risk factors

should have periodic exams by a physician on a regular basis.

The risks of heart disease in women have been rising in the last 50 years. There are several contributing factors to the risk of heart disease, according to Silvet. "Women are living longer and their lifestyles are more sedentary. Consumption of fast food, larger portions, and lack of exercise are all factors that contribute to the higher risk of heart disease in women. This trend in women's daily routine can lead to obesity, which in turn, can lead to diabetes and high blood pressure, thus increasing their risk for heart disease."

Add to this the discouraging statistic plaguing physicians that indicates smoking is declining in the general population, but increasing among women. This factor alone, according to the statistics from the American Heart Association, increases a woman's risk for having a heart attack 19 years earlier than in non-smoking women!

Approximately 435,000 women will have a heart attack this year. If you are a woman at risk, it is important to know the symptoms of a heart attack and what to do in case you need help. Knowing the warning signs and how to react, and sharing that with your family can make a life-saving difference should a heart attack strike.

Heart Attack Warning Signs

- ✓ Uncomfortable pressure, fullness, squeezing or pain anywhere in the chest lasting more than a few minutes
- ✓ Pain spreading to the shoulder,

neck, in one or both arms, stomach or back

- ✓ Chest discomfort with light-headedness, fainting, sweating, nausea, vomiting or shortness of breath
- ✓ Chest discomfort with a feeling of doom or imminent death.

Besides symptoms common to both genders, women may experience different symptoms, such as:

- ✓ Shortness of breath without chest pain
- ✓ Pain in the lower part of the chest
- ✓ Fatigue.

What should you do if you experience one or more of these symptoms?

1. Call 911 immediately. Assume that your symptoms are serious. Heart attack victims do best when they get treatment within the first hour of the first symptom.
2. Go to the nearest health care facility, *even if it is not a VA facility.*
3. Do not attempt to drive yourself to the hospital. Wait for the ambulance and be sure to tell the ambulance driver or EMT that you are having chest pain or believe you are having a heart attack.
4. You will be given aspirin by the emergency room team. Take aspirin only if it is readily accessible after you call 911.

How to Reduce Your Risk of HEART ATTACK



To find your risk for heart attack, check the boxes that apply to you:

- ☐ Family history of early heart disease (father or brother diagnosed before age 55 or mother or sister diagnosed before age 65)
- ☐ Age (Men 45 years or older; Women 55 or older)
- ☐ High blood cholesterol
- ☐ High blood pressure
- ☐ One or more previous heart attacks, angina, bypass surgery, or angioplasty, stroke, or blockages in neck or leg arteries
- ☐ Overweight
- ☐ Physically inactive
- ☐ Cigarette smoker
- ☐ Diabetes

The more risk factors you have, the greater your risk of heart attack.

**Reduce Your Risk of Heart Attack
by Taking Steps to Prevent or Control Risk Factors**

High Blood Pressure

- ✓ Have doctor check your blood pressure
- ✓ Aim for a healthy weight
- ✓ Follow a healthy eating plan, including food lower in salt and sodium
- ✓ Limit alcoholic beverages
- ✓ Take medication as prescribed

High Blood Cholesterol

- ✓ Have blood cholesterol checked every 5 years, or more often if needed
- ✓ Learn what your cholesterol numbers mean
- ✓ Follow a low-saturated fat, low cholesterol eating plan
- ✓ Become physically active
- ✓ Aim for a healthy weight
- ✓ Take medication as prescribed

Cigarette Smoking

- ✓ Stop smoking or cut back gradually
- ✓ Attend a smoking cessation class
- ✓ Keep trying if you can't quit the first time

Overweight

- ✓ Maintain a healthy weight, try not to gain extra
- ✓ If you are overweight, try to lose slowly (1/2-1 pound a week)

Diabetes

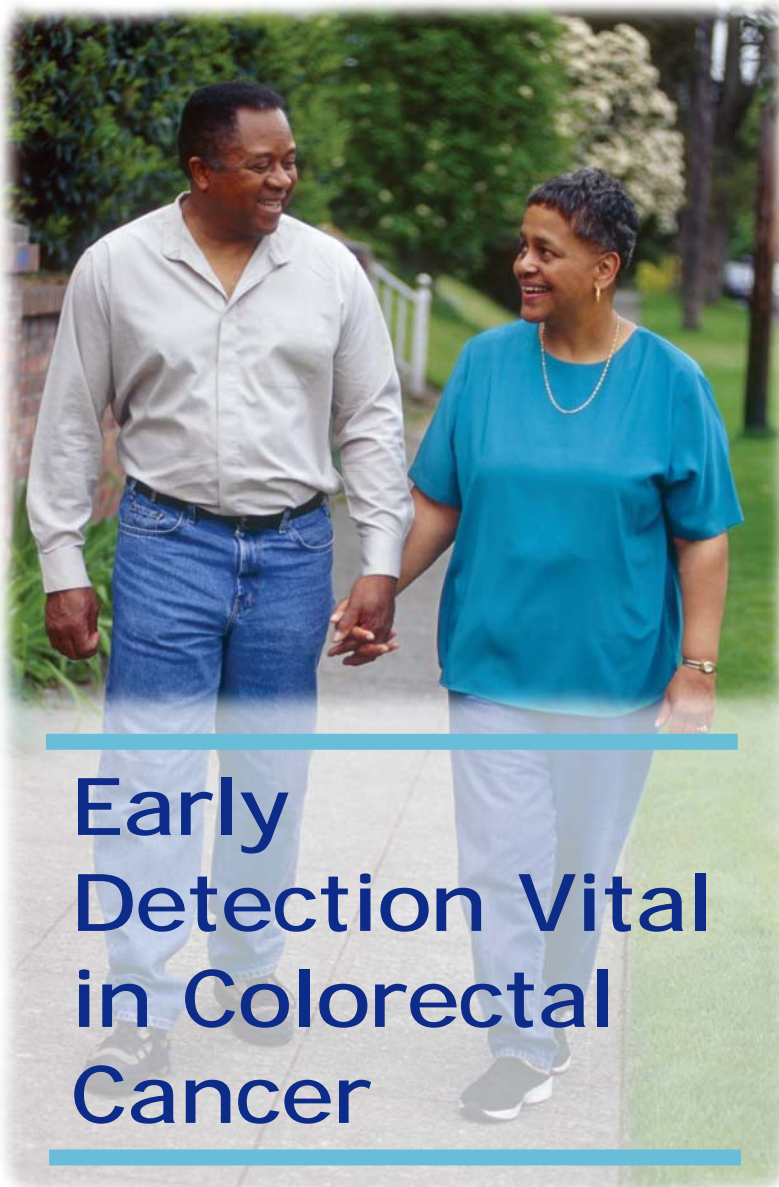
- ✓ Find out if you have diabetes
- ✓ Have your blood sugar level checked by your doctor
- ✓ Control your blood sugar levels

Physical Inactivity

- ✓ If you have a chronic condition or have been physically inactive, check with your provider before beginning exercise
- ✓ Do 30 minutes of moderate exercise, such as brisk walking, on most days of the week
- ✓ If needed, break the 30 minutes into periods of 10 minutes each

Veterans: Call 911 right away if you think it may be a heart attack. Do not drive to the hospital. Emergency medical staff will take you to the hospital.

<http://www.va.gov/cardiology>



Early Detection Vital in Colorectal Cancer

Cancer of the colon and rectum (colorectal) is the second leading cause of cancer death in the United States

(lung cancer ranks number one).

The American Cancer Society estimates that colorectal cancer is expected to cause about 56,730 deaths (28,320 men and 28,410 women) during 2004. They also point out that 90% of cases occur in those over the age of 50 and two-thirds of those cases could be avoided by early screening.

“Everyone over the age of 50 should be screened,” says Teresa Osborn, RN, Quality Management Officer, VA Desert Pacific Healthcare Network.

There are several types of tests available to screen for colorectal cancer. The least expensive test is a fecal occult

blood test (FOBT) which checks for hidden (occult) blood in feces. “If you are over 50, you should receive a FOBT test every year,” says Osborn.

The patient is given a kit and instructions about how to take a stool sample at home. The sample is then returned to the lab for testing. If the results are positive, additional testing will be done to determine what the blood trace

might mean. In addition to colon cancer, there are a number of non-cancerous conditions that might be the cause of the presence of blood.

An alternative to FOBT is a second test, called a flexible sigmoidoscopy, which should be done every five years. This test involves a flexible, hollow and lighted tube about the width of a finger. The tube is inserted in the rectum and has a video camera attached so that the physician can examine the lining of the colon closely on a display monitor. The test, which takes about 5 minutes, can be uncomfortable,

but is not painful.

A colonoscopy should be done every ten years, according to Osborn. This test is similar to a sigmoidoscopy, but views a longer section of the colon. If the physician sees a large polyp in this test, he may biopsy a section or remove the polyp entirely, if it appears suspicious.

Contact your primary care physician if you experience any of the warning signs for colorectal cancer, such as rectal bleeding or a change in bowel habits. But even if you do not have symptoms, Osborn stresses the value of screening. Statistics from the American Cancer Society indicate that the 5-year survival rate is 90% for people whose colorectal cancer is treated in an early stage. But if the colorectal cancer has spread to the liver or lungs when it is found, the 5-year survival rate is just 9%. “I cannot emphasize enough the importance of being screened if you are over 50,” says Osborn. “Early detection is vital in colorectal cancer.”

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VOLUNTEER

Rekindling the American Spirit

One of the most critical human needs is companionship, a friendly, dependable relationship, personal attention, care and warmth. Volunteering in a VA health care facility is your opportunity to say thank you to a special group of men and women who honored us by their service to our country.

Dedicated VA volunteers have provided over 58 years of service to America's veterans. Since 1946, VA volunteers have donated 508 million hours of service through hundreds of national and community organizations. In 2003, over 94,000 VA volunteers contributed close to 13,000,000 hours of service. This equated to 6,221 full time employee positions.

Volunteers do not always have to

do their volunteer work within a VA Medical Center. A number of other programs are available to help veterans. One such program is the Veterans History Project. The goal of this project is to collect the memories, accounts, and documents of war veterans from World

for exploring health care career opportunities; gaining experience in a health care environment; learning new skills; making new friends and qualifying to apply for college scholarships through the James H. Parke Award.

Show your appreciation to veterans whose service and sacrifices have helped preserve the freedom that we all value as Americans. As Calvin Coolidge said, "No person was ever honored for what he received. Honor has been the reward for what he gave."

"No person was ever honored for what he received. Honor has been the reward for what he gave."

Calvin Coolidge

War I, World War II, Korea, Vietnam and Persian Gulf Wars, and to preserve these stories for future generations.

Student volunteers can also help as an important part of the VA medical centers' treatment team. Volunteering offers students an excellent opportunity

reward for what he gave."

To find out more information on volunteering contact your nearest VA Medical Center and ask for Voluntary Services or go to www.va.gov/volunteer.

Remember, you can make a difference.



Cold and Flu Prevention - as Simple as Washing Your Hands

Handwashing is one of the simplest, easiest, and most effective ways to prevent the flu and other illnesses. Amazingly, it is also one of the most overlooked. Health care experts recommend scrubbing your hands vigorously for at least 15 seconds with soap and water; about as long as it takes to recite the English alphabet. This will wash away cold viruses and staph and strep bacteria, as well as many other disease-causing microbes. This also will help prevent accidentally passing those germs on to others.

It is especially important to wash your hands:

- ☞ Before, during, and after you prepare food
- ☞ Before you eat, and after you use the bathroom
- ☞ After handling animals or animal waste
- ☞ When your hands are dirty, and
- ☞ More frequently when someone in your home is sick

If you are unable to wash your hands, waterless hand sanitizers containing alcohol have been found to be as effective as soap and water at preventing the spread of infection.

New My HealthVet Web Site Offers One Stop Access

Are you one of the millions of Americans who use the Internet? Today over 75% of the population use Internet services to simplify their lives. Many of you have found health and medical information online.

Now the VA Desert Pacific Healthcare Network facilities offer a special health site just for veterans. My HealthVet (www.visn22.med.va.gov) extends VA health care into veteran's homes. The web site consists of two links that open a gateway to help you secure your optimal health. The Health Information link includes a drug database, medical dictionary, news on veteran benefits and much more. Our On-Line Patient Services link offers the convenience of ordering prescription refills from home, as well as reviewing appointments and co-payment balances. In the near future, many new enhancements will allow you to enter data that will help you and your physician manage your health. In addition, you will be able to read copies of key parts of your VA medical record.

There are two levels of registration for these services:

1. Health Information can be accessed by selecting and follow-

ing instructions to complete an on-line application.

2. On-Line Patient Services link contains individual patient information, so we require additional steps to ensure your privacy. Select the VA facility you use and download the application. Following the facility instructions, take the completed application and user agreement to one of the approved locations. You will be asked for a picture ID prior to receiving your temporary password. Once you get home, sign in and change your password to one that you can easily remember.

Veterans who are not currently using VA medical services can sign up for the Health Information only. You must be a registered VA patient to access On-Line Patient Services. If you interested in finding out more about registering for VA Medical Care, just select the facility closest to you. Information about registering is provided on the facility online services pages.

Don't wait – type in www.visn22.med.va.gov and select the My HealthVet logo. Follow the helpful instructions

and you're on your way! Patient Education Coordinators at each facility can help you access this new service if you need any help.



PERSONAL EMERGENCY PLAN

If the **UNTHINKABLE**
Happens, *Will You Be Prepared?*



Have you and your family planned for the unexpected? Today, we are faced with both natural and manmade disasters. It has never been so important for you and your family to complete a family emergency plan. Here are a few tips to help you put your plan together:

- Decide where you will meet if you are not immediately together. Select two places, one close to your home in case of fire and one outside your neighborhood in case you are unable to reach your home.
 - Choose a person that everyone will telephone in case you are separated. Consider selecting someone who lives outside the immediate area, to increase the chances that telephone calls can go through. Always carry the phone number with you.
 - Place important family records in a fireproof container.
 - Keep a supply of essentials ready; you should rotate the supplies every 6 months to keep them fresh. Some supplies to consider keeping are:
 - ✓ Water. Plan on 1 gallon per person per day. You should store enough to last 3 days. Nonperishable packaged foods that can be eaten cold. (Don't forget the manual can opener!)
 - ✓ Blankets or sleeping bags, and other items to help keep you warm.
 - ✓ Extra glasses, medications, car keys and other essentials
 - ✓ Battery-operated flashlights and radios. Don't forget to check the batteries periodically; keep extras on hand.
 - Put away some money; consider keeping small bills, such as ones and fives. If you are not able to get to the bank/ATM, you will have some money to buy essentials.
 - Plan what you will do with your pets. They depend upon you. Remember service animals are the only animals allowed in shelters. Identify the hotels and motels that allow animals, and locate animal boarding facilities that might accept your pets.
- Basic planning will save you and your family time and energy should a disaster strike. A few moments of planning today will pay off should you ever need to enact your personal emergency preparedness plan. For more information, please contact the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) or the American Red Cross.

VA Desert Pacific Healthcare Network Vet Centers

Anaheim Vet Center

859 South Harbor Boulevard
Anaheim, CA 92805-5157
714-776-0161

Corona Vet Center

800 Magnolia Ave., Suite 110
Corona, CA 92879-3123
951-734-0525

East Los Angeles Vet Center

5400 E. Olympic Boulevard
Suite 140
Commerce, CA 90022-5147
323-728-9966

Las Vegas Vet Center

1040 E. Sahara Avenue, Suite 1
Las Vegas, NV 89503-3232
702-388-6369

Los Angeles Vet Center

1045 W. Redondo Beach Boulevard
Suite 150
Gardena, CA 90247-4129
310-767-1221

San Bernardino Vet Center

155 W. Hospitality Lane, Suite 140
San Bernardino, CA 92408-3315
619-294-2040

San Diego Vet Center

2900 Sixth Avenue
San Diego, CA 92103-1003
619-294-2040

Sepulveda Vet Center

9737 Haskell Avenue
Sepulveda, CA 91343-1618
818-892-9227

Ventura Vet Center

790 E. Santa Clara
Ventura, CA 93001-2964
805-585-1860

Vista Vet Center

1830 West Drive, Suites 103/104
Vista, CA 92083-6125
760-643-2070

West Los Angeles Vet Center

5730 Uplander Way, Suite 100
Culver City, CA 90230-6615
310-641-0326

REACHING US IS EASY

★ VA Medical Centers

VA Southern Nevada Healthcare System

P.O. Box 360001
Las Vegas, NV 89036
702-636-3000

Mike O'Callaghan Federal Hospital

4700 Las Vegas Boulevard North
Las Vegas, NV 89191
702-653-2215

VA Loma Linda Healthcare System

11201 Benton Street
Loma Linda, CA 92357
909-825-7084

VA Long Beach Healthcare System

5901 East Seventh Street
Long Beach, CA 90822
562-826-8000

VA San Diego Healthcare System

3350 La Jolla Village Drive
San Diego, CA 92161
858-552-8585

VA Greater Los Angeles Healthcare System

11301 Wilshire Boulevard
Los Angeles, CA 90073
310-478-3711

Community Clinics

Anaheim

1801 W. Romneya Drive
3rd Floor, Suite 303
Anaheim, CA 92801
714-780-5400

Antelope Valley

547 W. Lancaster Blvd.
Lancaster, CA 93536
661-729-8655

Bakersfield

1801 Westwind Drive
Bakersfield, CA 93301
661-632-1800

Cabrillo

2001 River Avenue
Long Beach, CA 90806
562-388-8000

California



Symbol Key

- ★ VA Medical Centers
- ▲ Community-Based Outpatient Clinics

Chula Vista

835 3rd Avenue
Chula Vista, CA 91910
619-409-1600

Corona

800 Magnolia Avenue #101
Corona, CA 92879
951-817-8820

East Los Angeles

5400 E. Olympic Boulevard #150
City of Commerce, CA 90040
323-725-7557

Escondido

815 East Pennsylvania Avenue
Escondido, CA 92025
760-466-7020

Gardena

1251 Redondo Beach Boulevard
3rd Floor
Gardena, CA 90247
310-851-4705

Henderson

2920 Green Valley Parkway,
Suite 215
Henderson, NV 89014
702-456-3825

Imperial Valley

528 G Street
Brawley, CA 92227
760-344-1881

Las Vegas

MASH Village
1581 N. Main Street
Las Vegas, NV 89101
702-386-3140

Lompoc

Contact Santa Barbara
805-683-1491

Los Angeles

351 E. Temple Street
Los Angeles, CA 90012
213-253-50008

Mission Valley

8810 Rio San Diego Drive
San Diego, CA 92108
619-400-5000

Oxnard

250 W. Citrus Grove Avenue
Suite 150
Oxnard, CA 93030
805-983-6384

Palm Desert

41-865 Boardwalk, Suite 103
Palm Desert, CA 92211
760-341-5570

Pahrump

2100 E. Calvada Boulevard
Pahrump, NV 89048
775-751-2053

VA Southern Nevada Healthcare System

Pasadena

1350 N. Altadena Dr.
Pasadena, CA 91007
626-296-9514

San Luis Obispo

1288 Moro St., #200
San Luis Obispo, CA 93401
805-543-1233

Santa Ana

Bristol Medical Center
2740 S. Bristol Street
1st Floor, Suite 100
Santa Ana, CA 92704
714-825-3500

Santa Barbara

4440 Calle Real
Santa Barbara, CA 93110
805-683-1491

Sepulveda

16111 Plummer Street
Sepulveda, CA 91343
818-891-7711

South Los Angeles

3737 E. Martin Luther King Jr.
Blvd., Suite 515
Lynwood, CA 90262
1-800-455-0264

Sun City

28125 Bradley Road
Suite 130
Sun City, CA 92586
909-672-1931

Upland

1238 E. Arrow Highway,
No. 100
Upland, CA 91786
909-946-5348

Victorville

12138 Industrial Boulevard
Suite 120
Victorville, CA 92392
760-951-2599

Vista

1840 West Drive
Vista, CA 92083
760-643-2000

Whittier/Santa Fe Springs

10210 Orr and Day Road
Santa Fe Springs, CA 90670
562-864-5565

Veterans' Health Today

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Long Beach, CA 90822

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